LANGUAGE USAGE WORKSHEET

*Huckleberry Finn*

Below is a passage from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Your assignment is to rewrite it in proper, standard English. Read through the passage at least twice, underlining or highlighting all of the mistakes you can find as you read. Then rewrite the passage, fixing the errors.

You don’t know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunty Polly–Tom’s Aunt Polly, she is–and Mary, and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before.

Now the way that book winds up is this: Tom and me found the money that the robbers hid in the cave, and it made us rich. We got six thousand dollars apiece–all gold. It was an awful sight of money when it was piled up. Well, Judge Thatcher he took it and put it out at interest, and it fetched us a dollar a day apiece all the year round–more than a body could tell what to do with. The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn’t stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied. But Tom Sawyer he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. So I went back.

The widow she cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it. She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn’t do nothing but sweat, and feel all cramped up. Well, then, the old thing commenced again. The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn’t go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn’t really anything the matter with them–that is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better.

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn’t care no more about him, because I don’t take no stock in dead people.

LANGUAGE USAGE WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

There can be many different revisions of this passage depending on how much of the flavor of the passage you want to leave in or take out. One of the interesting aspects of doing this exercise is trying to decide which phrases should be used in “proper English” and which ones should not. Does “proper English” include colloquialisms? A businessman using “proper English” telling a similar story about his childhood would never use some of the phrases that Huck uses here. Does that mean that these phrases are not “proper English”? Some corrections are black and white: the subject and the verb have to agree, double negatives are unacceptable, and words must be spelled correctly. Things that break hard and fast rules of English are easy to spot. But, there are many gray areas in this passage. What is a run-on sentence? Exactly how should it be rewritten? What is a matter of style or meaning as opposed to correct usage? After students write their own revisions (individually or in small groups), discuss with them which things in the passage *must* be changed, which things probably *should* be changed, which things *could* be changed, and *why*.